

Bon Air Parents Virtual Town Hall Meeting
Director's Opening Remarks
Valerie Boykin
May 12, 2020 7:00 PM

Greetings All,

Thank you for joining us for our first parent Town Hall Forum.

We are excited that so many of you are able to join us by computer or phone.

The Goals for tonight are to:

- Provide you with up-to-date information regarding DJJ's Bon Air Operations
- COVID 19 Response Planning
- Current Status of the youth
- What is provided and needed for youth as they leave our care
- Answer your questions provided in advance. We ask that you send any questions that you have tonight over the Questions feature if you are on the Go To Meeting site or contact our Family Engagement Team and we will answer your questions at a later time.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We certainly have found ourselves in an unprecedented situation as the coronavirus – COVID 19 has hit Virginia, the US and the world. Unfortunately, DJJ and, specifically Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center was not spared. This has been a scary time for us all with new information about the virus and its impact coming out all the time.

I want you to know that DJJ managers and staff across the agency began planning for the possible attack of the virus weeks before the first case was announced in Virginia on March 7. You will hear about some of our efforts to prepare tonight. We enacted facility wide protocols for employees and the youth and have modified them as new information has come out from the CDC.

Beginning, the day after the Governor declared the state of emergency on March 12, our management level COVID 19 Response Team began daily week day meetings for the first few weeks followed by three days a week which continues as we speak. We reached out to the Virginia Department of Health in February and they have been working with us ever since. Unfortunately, we had our first staff to test positive on April 1 and the first youth to test positive on April 5. Contract tracing is important during a virus but we may never know when or how it entered the facility. Certainly, it could have been staff, it could have been a new youth arrival, it could even have been through visitation that we had suspended only a short time beforehand. It could also be all of the above.

Never-the-less, we had to make tough decisions at that time of the first positive youth. Based on the guidance provided by the medical experts and scientist, the epidemiologist, we went into a facility wide quarantine in an effort to isolate and determine the extent of COVID 19 on the campus. You will recall that quarantines were and still are happening in the community when there is exposure. We did not know who had been exposed and quarantine in a facility,

unfortunately, means remaining in one's room for extending periods of time. Prior to the quarantine, we had some parents asking for release and others questioning why we had not separated and quarantined all youth. We made that decision when it was medically warranted. As a result, over a two week period, we identified 26 youth who had little to no symptoms but tested positive for COVID 19. Had we not stepped up our testing protocols which exceed those in the community we may have never known that they had the virus. You will hear more about those protocols from our health officials. The quarantine lasted a little over two weeks as our outside professional cleaning crew was delayed in returning to the facility to finish the deep clean in the living areas. You will hear more about our cleaning efforts as well.

I am happy to report that as a result of the quarantine, we believe that we have slowed the spread of the virus. We have only had three additional youth to test positive following the quarantine and all but two of those youth live in 4 of our 14 housing units. All youth have fully recovered. The Health Department advises us that we can only slow the spread and just like in the community, it will take some time to be totally gone or eradicated. We have not had a youth to test positive in nearly two weeks. However, we are not out of the woods and neither is the rest of the country, unfortunately. We do hope that we have hit our curve, the highest numbers.

You have heard a lot in the media about releasing youth. I want you to know that DJJ does not have the authority to release most of the youth at Bon Air. The Courts maintain that authority. I will say that we began looking at the release status of youth in March and continue to do so today. We have been able to reduce the population by about 15 % and if appropriate will continue to see when and where others might be released.

It seems that COVID 19 is here with us for a while. The experts cannot tell us when it will be gone but I need for you to know that your child's health and well-being along with the employees of this agency is a priority to us and we will continue to do all in our power to ensure their well-being.

I would now like to present the Honorable Brian Moran, Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security for opening remarks.